

The Empire and Christianity

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themselves to virginity—an outspokenness based on the confident assumption that human, and more especially womanly, nature is weak and liable to err—shews that he was profoundly diffident of the success of his preaching. Nevertheless, when the counsel of perfection offered by the Church was the avoidance of marriage, it is a just charge against Christianity that it was in this respect anti-civic and anti-social.

On the other hand, it is to be remembered that this avoidance of marriage and its responsibilities was no new thing in the Roman Empire. For centuries the State had been alarmed at the growth of an unwillingness, manifested especially in the higher orders of society, to undertake the duties of parentage. Special bounties and immunities from taxation were offered to the fathers even of three children; checks were placed upon divorce; taxes were levied upon the obstinate bachelor and widower who clung to what he called the blessings of detached irresponsibility (*prtfemia orbitatis*). These laws were all based on the theory that it is a man's civic duty to marry and give sons and daughters to the service of his country, and we find one of the Panegyrists declaring them to be the very foundation of the State, because they supply a nursery of youth and a constant flow of manly vigour to the Roman armies. * Yet so powerful were the attractions of a childless life (*{prtBvalida orbitate*—Tac[^] Ann., iii., 25) that

* *Vere dicuntur e\$\$n fundanunta rd publics, qttia seminarium ju'ventutis ft quasi fonteni humani roboris semper JKomanis exerciti-bus mimstrarunt (Pan Vet.) vi., 2).*